

Michigan Freedom Trail Commission Meeting Minutes

November 16, 2018
Michigan History Center

Commissioners in attendance: Ronald Brown (by phone), Amanda Campbell (by phone), Rochelle Danquah, Roy Finkenbine, Edwina Murphy, Michael Nassaney, David Teeter (by phone)

Staff: Sandra Clark

Visitor: Blair R. Zaid

Chairperson Finkenbine called the meeting to order at 11:08 a.m.

Approval of Agenda: Nassaney moved approval of the amended order of the agenda; Brown seconded the motion and it was adopted.

Introductions/Checking In: Commissioners shared updates and introduced themselves to Zaid, who is completing her dissertation in anthropology/archaeology at Michigan State University.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Nassaney moved approval of the minutes of the September 7, 2018 meeting as amended to indicate that he attended the meeting. Danquah seconded the motion and it was adopted.

Network to Freedom nominations:

- Danquah is working with Jamon Jordon to help him nominate his tours. She also noted that documentation is available for the financial aid to the movement provided by the Fort Street Presbyterian Church.
- Interest and a new Michigan Historical Marker at Evergreen Cemetery may create a Jackson nomination.
- A discussion of ways to develop one or more nominations in Cass County given the competing interests and interpretations in that area led to a broader discussion of how to help local communities through the nomination process making sure information is accurate and all who are interested are included. Ideas included letters from the commission encouraging specific action and workshops; both are things for the subcommittee to consider.

2019 Meeting Schedule: Commissioners agreed that Fridays are best and that Mondays and Wednesdays do not work. The four meetings should be held in February, May, early September, and November or early December. One or two in the warmer months might be held in Detroit or on the west side of the state. All agreed that in future, if weather makes travel unsafe, the meeting should simply be held by phone.

October 27 Gathering Followup Observations:

- Commissioners noted the general positive response to the gathering and the clear desire of attendees to have more convenings and work toward a more collaborative structure.

- They also observed the tension between academic concerns for authenticity and accuracy and community-based beliefs. While the tension will always be there, shared interest and excitement can overcome this division.
- The hunger for information and sharing information is high, and the combination of academic and community work can bring together micro-histories and big picture patterns that reveal change over time.
- The group's emphasis on heritage tourism, and the tourism draw of the Underground Railroad mean that local governments and convention and visitors bureaus should be recruited for future gatherings.
- The group seemed least concerned about money, focusing more on action and volunteerism.
- Reaching teachers and schools was also a major concern.
- A network that is broad and respectfully brings all kinds of people together and creates sharing opportunities is needed.

Next Steps:

- Get sub-committees up and running, inviting those who indicated an interest to join. This will involve one or more commission members taking a leadership role, getting the names to them, and creating some specific assignments for the sub-committees.
- Create print or on-line "pamphlets" that begin to build the heritage tourism infrastructure. Options include creating a design template that communities or regions could use to create "tours," deciding on what should and should not be included, perhaps with categories that indicate the level of research and certainty about a site's history.
- Start planning next year's meeting, which might include workshop experience on doing nominations and/or a dramatic presentation. This includes building a master list that includes convention and visitors bureaus, relevant counties and museums as well as more of those interested in the subject.
- Prepare a white paper based on the responses at the convening that provides background, advocacy for future action and a roadmap for future action. Roy, Sandra, Tobi and Michael will work on a draft that can circulate before the February meeting.

New Business:

- Finkenbine appointed Murphy and Teeter to the nominating committee, which is bring recommendations to the February meeting. Clark will provide the relevant sections of the bylaws.
- Over the next six months Danquah and Finkenbine will review the current bylaws and recommend any changes they believe should be considered.
- Vacancies need to be reviewed. Kerry Baldwin has resigned and the status of Juanita Moore and the Rev. Turman due to their retirements is not clear. Commissioners suggested that Jennifer Evans might be a good fit for the Charles H. Wright Museum seat. They also recommended Carol Mull and Jamon Jordan.
- Recognition signage will be a topic for the next meeting.

News and Announcements:

- Anna Lisa Cox is speaking and UDM at noon on December 7.

- UDM is featuring a new play based on William and Ellen Craft at its February 14 “Love Stories of the Underground Railroad” event.

Upon a motion by Nassaney, the meeting adjourned at 1:17 p.m.

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